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THE CENTRAL BUREAU OF PLANNING AND STATISTICS.*

By Z. L. POTTER.

When I undertook to tell the story of the work of the Central Bureau of Planning and Statistics I discovered that a very clear statement of it had been prepared by Mr. F. B. McLeary, a member of the staff of the Bureau. I therefore endeavored to persuade Mr. McLeary to take my place on the program. This he was unable to do but he gave me permission to use his paper in whole or in part. I have taken advantage of his offer to utilize it practically in its entirety, and he should be given the greater part of the credit.

The Central Bureau of Planning and Statistics came into existence early in June of 1918 for the express purpose of preparing for the attention of the President a "Conspectus of all the Present War Activities of the Government" on which conspectus could be based a "Periodic checking up of actual operations and results."

The passages quoted are from a letter written by the President to Mr. Bernard Baruch, chairman of the War Industries Board, under date of May 24, 1918. Pursuant to the recommendation embodied in this letter, Mr. Baruch authorized Mr. E. F. Gay to gather together a group of men to secure from various governmental agencies weekly and monthly "Progress Reports" and to prepare, primarily on the basis of these reports, authoritative surveys of the work accomplished toward the effective conduct of the war.

In order to perform these functions it was found necessary to make a survey of the statistical information available in the various governmental departments. This survey—made in July, 1918—disclosed the fact that in the gathering and compiling of statistical data there was very considerable duplication.

The industries of the country were being burdened with the answering of innumerable questionnaires, many of which sought information of a character necessitating a vast amount of clerical labor and the interruption of highly important work. Moreover, the same questions addressed to the same firms and

* Paper read at the eightieth Annual Meeting of the American Statistical Association.

individuals would frequently appear in a number of different questionnaires, and questionnaires would be sent out by one government agency in quest of information that had already been compiled and brought up to the minute by another.

Need of a statistical clearing house was both obvious and imperative. By reason of the contacts which the Central Bureau had already established with the Division of Planning and Statistics of the United States Shipping Board, with the Bureau of Research of the War Trade Board, with the Division of Planning and Statistics of the War Industries Board, and with the Statistical Committee of the War Labor Policies Board, through the fact that these agencies were all reporting to Mr. Gay, the Central Bureau of Planning and Statistics appeared to be the logical agency for revising and consolidating the questionnaires going out under governmental authority and for building up an accessible index to all statistical data gathered by governmental and quasi-governmental agencies.

The program of the Central Bureau, therefore, expanded to include not only (1) The preparation of a periodic survey or conspectus of all the war activities of the Government, but also and incidental to the preparation of such a survey; (2) The organization and maintenance of a clearing house of statistical information.

The staff of the Central Bureau of Planning and Statistics on October 5 numbered about 63 members, 28 of whom were experts made up in about equal proportions of statisticians and economists and business men. The staff, between July and December 21 included the following specialists under definite assignment:

E. F. Gay, Director

H. S. Dennison, Assistant Director

<i>Name</i>	<i>Assignment</i>
A. N. Holcombe	Conspectus of Special War Activities
E. E. Day	Statistical Audit
Z. L. Potter	Statistical Clearing House
V. E. Parmenter	" " "
R. C. Routsong	" " "
F. W. Jenkins	" " "
C. W. Doten	" " "

<i>Name</i>	<i>Assignment</i>
E. J. Frost	War Department
L. D. Gibbs	“ “
R. C. Hay	“ “
H. M. Goddard	“ “
R. S. Hale	“ “
W. S. Rossiter	Navy Department
F. L. Lamson	Labor Department
F. G. Bates	“ “
R. S. Marshall	Railroad Administration
J. W. Carmalt	“ “
J. E. Downey	Food Administration and Department of Agriculture
V. C. Finch	
F. A. Roper	
Eliot Jones	Fuel Administration
F. R. Wadleigh	“ “
C. S. Whittier	Emergency Fleet Corporation
F. B. McLeary	War Trade Board
H. M. Bates	Special Studies
F. T. Kurt	“ “
J. V. Hall	“ “

I. DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONSPECTUS.

Conspectus of War Activities:

The first step in picturing the various war activities of the United States was to analyze and classify these activities and to indicate the respective agencies charged with their administration. In accordance with this plan a printed “Conspectus of Special War Activities” was issued August 14, 1918, and a supplementary report September 11, 1918. In connection with this work an indexed Digest of the Federal Administrative

Agencies was also prepared. This Digest has been revised from time to time and now gives an accurate and complete view of the administrative organization of the Government.

Weekly and Monthly Surveys:

For the purpose of facilitating the preparation of weekly and monthly surveys and special reports covering the various war activities of the Government, a division of the Central Bureau designated as the Statistical Audit, was early created, which division became responsible for the standardizing of graphic methods and the working out of innumerable statistical and mechanical details for the Central Bureau reports.

Army:

The information contained in the first Army survey for the week ending July 26, 1918, represented a summary of certain data contained in the weekly statistical report of the War Department, and in this and subsequent surveys attention was particularly directed to such portions of the Army program as seemed in need of redoubled concentration of effort.

Since the issuance of the first weekly report on the Army program, the Central Bureau has constantly striven to clarify the data presented and to broaden their scope; and in working towards these ends the Bureau, it is believed, has performed a very definite service.

The most recent Army report, its character changed to accord with conditions following the armistice, comprises 21 pages, as against 6 pages in its report of July 26. The data contained therein show, among other things, cancellations of contracts by geographical sections to November 30th, stocks of military equipment and ammunition on hand at November 15th, reserves on hand in the Chemical Warfare Department, the status of aircraft production under contracts placed both here and abroad, the situation with regard to goods on order for the Signal Corps, the total number of American Service Squadrons at the front and the number equipped with American planes, estimated reductions in expenditures for motor vehicles, the total value of all clothing and equipage on hand November 1st, appropriations and expenditures to November 5 for construction work at the various training camps, the

situation with regard to American locomotives overseas and on order, stocks of medical supplies on hand at November 1st, a complete summary of casualties reported up to November 26th and the status of the Army as regards demobilization.

Navy:

Four monthly surveys of the Navy Department have been prepared by the Central Bureau. This work has been facilitated by the friendly interest and coöperation manifested by the various chiefs of the department from whom it has been necessary to secure the requisite data; and as a definite result the Navy Department is arranging regularly to provide the Central Bureau with such information as will make possible the preparation of accurate and comprehensive surveys of the Navy Department, these surveys to be submitted, through the Central Bureau, to the Chief Executive.

Labor Department:

A report on the activities of the Department of Labor has been prepared, showing in particular the organization, functions and activities of the special war agencies created at the request of the President, January 4, 1918.

In coöperation with the Division of Planning and Statistics of the War Industries Board and the United States Employment Service, a weekly survey of labor conditions in one hundred and twenty industrial centers of the United States is now being conducted by telegraph.

Railroad Administration:

Three major reports on the railroad situation have been prepared by the Central Bureau, in which have been analyzed the revenues, expenses, railway operating income and freight train operation of the railroads under federal control. In addition a study has been made of the export freight situation at North Atlantic and Gulf ports as of November 21st, and a report has been prepared showing the freight on hand at the ports and the volume of movement to the ports. Arrangements have been made for the submittal of weekly reports on this situation. A special study has also been made of the coal car supply at the mines and the methods employed for equalizing supply and demand.

Department of Agriculture and Food Administration:

Two major reports have been prepared covering the war activities of the Department of Agriculture and the Food Administration. These reports have shown the various factors of the food situation on October 1 and November 1, 1918. The statistical agencies of the Department of Agriculture and the Food Administration have also been studied with a view to disclosing and eliminating duplication of effort. A general analysis of the functions of the Food Administration has been made in the light of reconstruction.

Fuel Administration:

Three major surveys of the fuel situation have been prepared by the Central Bureau and submitted to Mr. Garfield. In addition, fourteen brief surveys have been prepared, showing the fuel situation week by week from August 31st to November 30th, inclusive. Supplementing these surveys, a report has been made on the organization, personnel and functions of the Fuel Administration; and a brief survey of the leading activities of the Fuel Administration since its organization is now in preparation.

Shipping Board and Emergency Fleet Corporation:

Considerable preliminary work has been done toward the preparation of regular monthly surveys covering the Shipping Board and the Emergency Fleet Corporation. Certain of the data assembled by this Bureau has been incorporated in the first consolidated report on the war activities of the government.

War Trade Board:

On the basis of an outline showing the principal objects of the War Trade Board and the means for their accomplishment, reports have been secured from all the bureaus of the War Trade Board setting forth their activities during the period from January 1 to October 1, 1918. These reports, together with various papers and documents relating to the trade agreements entered into by the United States, have been the basis for an extended survey of the activities of the War Trade Board for the first nine months of 1918.

Consolidated Survey of War Activities:

The original plan for a "Conspectus" contemplated a composite picture of all the war activities of the Government, to be submitted monthly for the President's attention. This plan found partial realization in the first Consolidated Survey as of October 1st, which summarized in 24 pages of graphs and tables the progress being made upon the more important parts of the war program, and reflected, among other things: (1) the status of the Army as regards ordnance equipment and ordnance ammunition, chemical warfare service, air service, quartermaster supplies, engineer and motor transport equipment and supplies, and tonnage and "turnarounds"; (2) the status of the Navy with regard to vessel construction, ordnance and aircraft stocks and deliveries, fuel and miscellaneous supplies, and clothing and subsistence; (3) the status of clothing and subsistence for both Army and Navy; (4) the status of the import program by trade regions and by commodities; (5) the control, by trade agreements and the blockade, over exports to the European neutrals; (6) the tonnage available and the status of the shipbuilding program; (7) the fuel situation; and (8) the food situation.

Had the war continued, a consolidated survey of war activities would have been prepared for the President each month. It is believed that such a report would have proved extremely useful in helping the President as the chief administrator of the Government to devote his energies in a way that would have aided most materially in an efficient carrying out of our war program.

Special Studies:

Of the special studies made by the Central Bureau, mention should be made, among others, of reports dealing with:

- (1) The Tonnage Available for the Transport of Transatlantic Cargo;
- (2) Research Activities Conducted by Governmental and Quasi-Governmental Agencies;
- (3) Factory Inspection Activities under the Direction of the War, Navy and Labor Departments and the Public Health Service;

- (4) Agencies Engaged in the Gathering of Data Relating to Economic Conditions in Foreign Countries;
- (5) Wool Requirements of the Army;
- (6) The Distribution and Availability of the Cotton Supply.

II. STATISTICAL CLEARING HOUSE.

The chief function of the Statistical Clearing House is indicated by its title; it maintains and keeps available for instant reference a card file showing just what statistics have been gathered by the statistical agencies of the Government and where they may be had. Toward this end it has built up a practically complete record of commodity, shipping, labor and railroad statistics; and it has compiled and distributed four statistical bulletins, containing a classified list, respectively, of "Food Statistics," "Fuel Statistics," "Mineral Statistics," and "Forest Products Statistics."

To list the first of these, nearly 500 pages, legal size, were required. Two other bulletins, on "Labor Statistics" and "Railroad Statistics," respectively, are in course of preparation.

In order to place the various statistical agencies in Washington in touch with one another's activities so as to develop the maximum amount of effort and wherever possible, to eliminate duplication, the clearing house, since September 11th, has issued the *Weekly Statistical News*. In this periodical, circulation of which is confidential, is listed statistical work planned, under way or just completed. It is a logical means for bringing about a closer coördination of the statistical agencies of the Government, and can, it is believed, be shaped into an instrument of wide usefulness.

In order to give further aid in simplifying and perfecting the machinery for gathering statistical information, the Statistical Clearing House offers expert counsel in the shaping of questionnaires, and within the last few months it has been privileged to serve an increasing number of governmental agencies. As a result, a considerable number of questionnaires which were obviously suffering from one or more questionnaire ailments—*e. g.* undue voluminousness, too many

general questions, unconscious impertinence—were brought up to a satisfactory standard. Others which appeared to be unnecessary, unfortunate, or poorly timed, were abandoned.

In this connection, reference should be made to the questionnaire service rendered by the Statistical Clearing House through its service in the chairmanship of a Joint Board on Industrial Surveys, organized to make a survey of conditions holding up production in industrial centers where important war contracts had been placed. The survey represented the joint action of the War and Navy Departments, Emergency Fleet Corporation, Railroad Administration, War Industries Board, Labor Department and Housing Corporation. The work was under way in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and a number of other cities when the signing of the armistice made its continuance unnecessary.

PRESENT ACTIVITIES AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES.

At the present time the Central Bureau is carrying forward four types of work:

(1) It is continuing, in its Statistical Clearing House, to gather information as to statistical data available in various governmental departments, and through the *Weekly Statistical News*, through special bulletins and through telephone and personal service, is endeavoring to make this information available to all those who have use for it. It is also offering expert questionnaire criticism to any of the governmental departments and is endeavoring further to standardize statistical practice.

(2) The weekly and monthly surveys of the activities of various governmental agencies are being carried forward as they were during the active period of the war.

(3) A survey of functions of war-time agencies is being carried forward, special consideration being given to which functions, if any, of those performed by these agencies, should become a part of permanent Government service and to which of the Government departments these functions should be assigned.

(4) In a memorandum dated December 2 and signed by the President, the Central Bureau is designated as the official

source through which shall be obtained economic data required by the American delegates at the Peace Conference. In comment thereon this paragraph is added:

"It is believed essential that there be one authoritative and exclusive source for the supplying of information of this character. If information is sought through more than one source there is a very considerable probability that conflicting advices will be received which will tend to discredit the whole. Our experience during the war has conclusively demonstrated on the one hand the danger of basing action on the unverified impressions of individuals as to facts, and, on the other hand, the importance of all who are working on a given problem basing their actions on a uniform and official estimate of the facts."

In fulfilling this duty, placed upon it by the President, the Central Bureau has undertaken to bring together all economic information that might be required by the Peace Conference, and has organized a party, headed up in the Central Bureau but composed of representatives of different war boards, that will make this information available at the peace table.

The latter two of these four tasks, on which the Central Bureau is now engaged, will clearly terminate in the course of the next few months. It is my belief, however, that the first two functions should be continued.

Duplication in the collection of statistical information by different governmental agencies increased during the period of the war, but is likely always to exist in a government composed of so many departments and bureaus whose functions are not always clearly defined and frequently overlap. It will always be desirable to have a Statistical Clearing House that will record the nature of all statistical information gathered by the Government and the place where it may be found, that will endeavor to eliminate duplication of work, and that will endeavor throughout the Government to secure the adoption of the best and uniform statistical practices.

Even more valuable, however, than the services to be rendered by such a clearing house are those that may be rendered through the preparation of periodic reports, for the President, on the activities of the various governmental departments.

Compared with our great business concerns, the United States Government has been extremely weak in central administration. The different governmental departments have been almost independent administrative establishments; even the bureaus of many departments have conducted their affairs with little administrative supervision from the heads of the departments and little relation to the activities of other bureaus. One reason for this lack of centralized administration is clearly the fact that our Presidents have, for the most part, never had large administrative experience before entering office. Another equally important reason, however, is the many difficulties that lie in the path of any chief executive who undertakes to inform himself regarding the multifarious activities of the Government. Through personal inspection and inquiry it is practically impossible for him to do so. He must rely upon reports.

The reports our chief executives have been accustomed to receive in the past have not, however, been such as to assist greatly in administrative control. They have not been prepared with sufficient frequency to serve this purpose and have been designed primarily to laud the achievements of the departments, whereas the President, from an administration standpoint, is most interested in things gone wrong that demand his attention. Furthermore, they have never been developed upon a consistent plan or in unified form. The fact is such reports as have been made, at least before the war, were developed more for political effect than as a means for administrative control.

The hope, it seems to me, of preventing a lapse back after the war into the bureaucracy which we had developed and were still further developing, lies in the continuance as an independent agency in close relation to the President, of an organization such as the Central Bureau, which will prepare for the President periodic reports that will be impartial in presentation of the facts and that will keep him closely in touch with the activities of the various branches of his great organization. To serve this function, if for no other purpose, the Central Bureau of Planning and Statistics should, in my judgment, become a permanent part of the Government.